



CRACTICUS NIGROGULARIS: Gould.

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Black-throated Crow-Shrike.

Vanga nigrogularis, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part V.; and in Syn. Birds of Australia, Part I.

Cracticus varius, Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 261.

THE Black-throated Crow-Shrike finds a natural asylum in New South Wales, the only one of the Australian colonies in which it has yet been found, and where it is by no means rare, although the situations it affects render it somewhat local; it is a stationary species, breeding in all parts of the country suitable to its habits and mode of life; districts of rich land known as apple-tree flats, and low open undulating hills studded with large trees, are the kind of districts to which it peculiarly resorts: hence the cow-pastures at Camden, the fine park-like estate of Charles Throsby, Esq., at Bong-bong, and the entire district of the Upper Hunter, are among the localities in which it may always be found.

It is usually seen in pairs, and from its active habits and conspicuous pied plumage, forms a rather striking object among the trees, the lower and outspreading branches of which are much more frequented by it than the higher ones; from these lower branches it often descends to the ground in search of insects and small lizards, which however form but a portion of its food, for as its powerful and strongly-hooked bill would lead us to infer, prey of a more formidable kind is often resorted to; its sanguinary disposition, in fact, leads it to feed on young birds, mice, and other small quadrupeds, which it soon kills, tears piecemeal and devours on the spot; wounded individuals on being handled inflict severe blows and lacerations on the hands of the captor, unless great care be taken to avoid them.

The nest, which is rather large and round, is very similar to that of the European Jay; those I examined were outwardly composed of sticks, neatly lined with fine fibrous roots, and generally placed on a low horizontal branch among the thick foliage.

The eggs are dark yellowish brown, spotted and clouded with markings of a darker hue, and in some instances with a few minute spots of black; their medium length is one inch and three lines by eleven lines in breadth.

The breeding-season commences in August, and continues during the four following months.

The sexes are so precisely alike in colouring, that although on comparison the female is found to be rather less than the male in all her admeasurements, they can only be distinguished with certainty by dissection.

Head, neck and chest black; hinder part of the neck, shoulders, centre of the wing, rump and under surface white; two middle tail-feathers entirely black, the remainder black largely tipped with white; bill lead-colour at the base, black at the tip; legs black; irides brown.

The young during the first autumn are very different from the adult, particularly in the colouring of the head and chest, which is light brown instead of black; the bill, as in most youthful birds, is also very different, the basal portion being dark fleshy brown instead of lead-colour.

The Plate represents a male and female of the natural size.